ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.
ED002208	N.A.	N.A.

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S): Harvard-Boston Summer Program

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED: Social Studies Team B, Proposal for a Unit on the City (Grades 4-5)

6. PUBLICATION TITLE: N.A.

7. EDITOR(S): N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
ORG. Harvard-Boston Summer Program
ST. Harvard University
CITY, STATE Cambridge, Massachusetts
TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE 1965 Harvard-Boston Summer Program, Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	1965	6

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED YES ☐ NO ☒

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED YES ☐ NO ☐

TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☒
FINAL ☐
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR Teachers' Guide

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

social studies	teaching techniques
curriculum development	student motivation
teacher training	elementary schools
	community study

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

A study unit on the city will allow the student to discover what a city has to offer and how to make the maximum use of it. The student should be able to see his culture, and himself as an individual, as a part of the whole city.

In presenting the unit content, efforts should be made to utilize the knowledge and experience of the student in order to motivate his inquiry. Content areas include food, recreation, protection, habitat, and occupation. Activities which stress student inquiry, self-instruction, and self-evaluation are interviewing residents of the school neighborhood, working with maps and aerial photographs, making field trips, giving oral and written reports, and roleplaying.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

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Team B

ED002208

1965 HARVARD-BOSTON SUMMER PROGRAM
Social Studies
Proposal for a Unit on the City
(Grades 4-5)

Introduction

As a topic for a social studies unit, "the city" is neither highly imaginative nor infrequently used. It is hoped however, that, as we shall develop it here, this unit will approach the subject of man's urban development from a position which is both imaginative and exciting to the teacher, while at the same time it provides the student with a refreshing taste of what may be an old dish.

To begin with, we as teachers are in a different boat from that of the children we will have in our classrooms. They come to school with quite a different perspective of the city and their relation to it than do we with our own concept of the city and its relationship to us. This is to say nothing of the preconceived notions we may harbor concerning the relationship of our students with their environment. Quite clearly, there must at the outset be some constant sort of coming to terms when student and teacher alike whet their curiosity with new ideas, and open their eyes, ears and minds a little wider. We would be in great error to assume at any time that a two-way exchange of ideas and experiences between teacher and child would not be a valuable and important aspect of this unit.

How can the city be used? That is, how can the child discover what a city has to offer and then make maximum possible use out of it? This apparently functional orientation presupposes that we ourselves are acquainted with the opportunities for horizon-broadening experiences that an urban complex can offer. This is not so much to say that we must be prepared to give guided tours of scenic attractions within the city as it is to say that we must begin to search our own conceptual thinking, and to scrutinize more closely our own rather glossy image of the city. Before we can expect to open the student's eyes, we must open our own.

To illustrate the sort of thinking we might do this summer, consider the idea of movement. Unlike the slow paced villages and towns in rural areas and the somewhat artificial hustle of the suburbs, the city is by its very raison d'etre a place of movement: people, goods, vehicles, messages, light, sound, and even the earth.

In each of the content areas it is possible to detect the theme of motion. While it may not be desirable always to have students thinking in terms of motion, it would seem a worthy and necessary goal that they should see how the hum-drum life of the city affects different people. Likewise, movement of people bears further consideration in terms of the structuring and re-structuring of that inscrutable unit, the neighborhood.

What is a neighborhood? Is the neighborhood of the Kennedy School part of the city? What comes in and goes out of a neighborhood? How is the immediate neighborhood of the school changing? What does the city of Boston have to do with this change? These are all questions which will be of prime concern throughout the unit, for it is this neighborhood which we have, quite arbitrarily, chosen to call a part of the city.

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It is hoped that during the orientation week this summer we will be able to devote some time to tackling questions of the sort we have outlined. On the spot observation and experience as well as ideas gleaned from reading and thinking will be of key importance if we are to begin our immersion in the subject matter effectively and efficiently.

Orientation

This unit, because it deals with the subject it does, presents the student with few of the glamorous enticements that are to be found at the outset in units on exploration or dinosaurs. If it is to avoid the inertia of boredom from the beginning both teacher and student must be aware of the potential excitement in (a) discovery of patterns of relationship of individual and city in everyday life, and (b) penetration of aspects of everyday life which are taken for granted merely at face value with little knowledge or appreciation for what lies beneath external appearances.

The approach of this unit will be to begin with a consideration of the city in the present and dwell there until certain levels of understanding have been attained. Perhaps it is unrealistic even to consider pressing back into the historic origins of the city.

Launching the unit into the present will serve to give the child a feeling of familiarity with the subject matter, i.e. we will begin with what is real and important to the child. We will start by considering their city, Boston, as they know it. Such a phenomenalistic approach as this, one which will entail qualitative analyses of many of the child's experiences in the city will, to say the least, be challenging to the teacher. While at times we shall want to expand the breadth of the child's horizons so far as it concerns his concept of the city, we must constantly attempt to use as our points of departure the experiences, places, and activities which constitute the "reality" of the child.

Objectives

Objectives which might be incorporated into the unit are:

a) Not to estrange the student from his culture, but to open his eyes to it that he may see it in the context of the city as a whole.

b) To place the child in some useful but workable context within the city. This is his city we will be studying; he is an active member of it, not a passive observer.

c) To develop an understanding of the role of ethnic influences in the city, and to consider the origins, problems, and benefits of these influences.

d) To develop some understanding of the forces which control the life and growth of the city today (i.e. social, economic, technological, geographic, and political) and which functioned during the history of its growth.

e) To develop an understanding for some of the reasons for growth and decay of an urban area.

f) To develop some understanding of the processes of change within the city; what brings such changes about - how is it best seen? What exactly is it that changes, people or things?

Content

In fulfilling these objectives it is important that they be carefully interpreted so as to strike some balance between the acquisition and utilization of knowledge by the student. In considering these goals it is likewise desirable that the distinction be made between the learning of fact and theory, the one being knowledge at a specific level, and the other, knowledge at a generalized level.

Arranged in the framework of content goals are some suggested specific subject areas. Under each subject area are listed questions or ideas to be pursued with the students in any of a variety of ways.

1) FOOD

a) What happens when the corner grocery store or supermarket runs out of potatoes?

- develop the idea of a wholesale market fed by warehouses and shipping, and feeding the smaller retail stores.

b) Does everyone like the same kind of food?

- develop the idea of personal vs. the more important, ethnically conditioned tastes; consider the influences of these tastes on the eating habits of other people.

c) Where do candy bars come from?

- develop the difference between food growing and food processing, the latter being a function of the cities where factories bring raw materials from other areas of the country and the world. (A field trip here would be recommended as there are several large confectionary concerns in the vicinity.)

d)

e)

2) RECREATION

a) Where can you play in the city?

- develop the idea of the variety of types and locations of play areas in the city.

b) Who governs a play area?

- develop the idea of conflict of interest of city park officials, police, owners of vacant lots, mothers, and older children.

c) Who owns a play area, to whom does it belong?

- contrast this with the previous concept; one need not necessarily determine the other.

d) So you want a playground?

- develop the problem of how and through whom the playground is planned and built in the city, and why more playgrounds are or are not needed.

e) Do grown-ups play?

- develop the idea of the universal need for some form of recreation for young and old, and what may happen if this need is not fulfilled.

f)

g)

3) PROTECTION

a) How does your family protect you?

- develop the idea of the protective function of the family unit and the need for solidarity among its members however many there may be.

b) What do friends do?

- develop the idea of peer group solidarity and the various types of protection that one's friends can provide under various circumstances. (A sociogram of sorts might be in order as one of the activities here.)

c) Who protects the people in a city?

- develop the ideas behind the need for police, fire, and health protection in the highly populated urban area. Does each of these agencies function as effectively as it should?

d) What do we really need protection from most?

- develop the idea that protection is a concept which involves more than physical harm, that feelings and emotions play an important role as well.

e)

f)

4) HABITAT

a) How do you know where you are?

- develop the idea of familiarity with places because of recognizable landmarks which must be constantly re-oriented as the city changes. (Map-making and other topographical skills could be usefully and excitingly employed here.)

b) Why does a person live where he does?

- develop the idea of the influence of the extended family as a determinant of where parents and their children settle; the idea of family income as a limitation, along with housing shortages and prejudiced landlords; the idea of minimal standards of cleanliness and decency as established by the board of health; displacement by redevelopers, etc.

c) What makes a neighborhood a nice looking place to live?

- attempt to develop here some of the aesthetic as well as the functional determinants of a "nice looking" city block; explore the idea of the people and institutions which now help or do not help to make a neighborhood a pleasant place to live. Possibly these investigations could be extended into the past to include a consideration of the processes of growth and decay in a given neighborhood.

d)

e)

5) OCCUPATION

a) Why does one's mother and/or father do the kind of work she/he/they do?

- develop some of the ideas behind the difference between skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor, and the relationship of each to labor organizations, industry, and the neighborhood.

b) What determines income?

- develop some of the factors which relate to the income of an individual. The differences between unskilled, semi-skilled, and professional and skilled workers' incomes; how overtime and especially dangerous work affect a man's income; how steam shovel operators receive a higher hourly wage than schoolteachers!

c) How are jobs interrelated?

- develop the idea that a city is a commercial center in that it provides for convenient exchange of goods and services between individuals as well as companies.

d)

Activities

The contexts and understandings which have been outlined above suggest a variety of possible activities on the part of the student. Such activities, Heathers points out, may be described in terms of process goals, i.e. rather than emphasizing the acquisition of knowledge per se, the stress is laid on the means by which knowledge

is acquired, evaluated, and used. Heathers classifies process goals under four headings: (1) tool skills, (2) inquiry, (3) self-instruction, and (4) self-evaluation.

Listed below are a few activities that would be appropriate in studying the city. We will need to consider how activities like these might contribute to the realization of each type of process goal:

a) interviewing of residents in the school neighborhood by students
b) work with topographic maps, aerial photographs, etc.
c) consultation of public officials, etc.
d) observation at home and in one's own neighborhood
e) observation of field trips
f) door to door survey of school neighborhood by students
g) making maps, murals, and models
h) oral and written reports
i) children assume teaching role and teach their teachers about the neighborhood they live in.

Preliminary Background Reading

It is hoped that you are unsettled enough by the concepts, assumptions, and generalizations dispensed thus far to add to the unit your own thoughts and questions. In this regard, the following readings should prove thought-provoking. (Starred books are available in paperback.)

		Where to order them:
Gordon, Mitchell	1963	Sick Cities*, Penguin Special #S234, Baltimore; Chs. 2, 5, 6
or		
Jacobs, Jane	1961	The Death and Life of the City*, Vintage #V241, New York; Chs. 4-6, 15, 18-20, 22
Peattie, Rod and Lisa	1952	The City, Henry Schuman Inc., New York (children's book)
Warner, S. B.	1962	Streetcar Suburbs, Harvard Press, Cambridge; skim Chs. 1-3, Read Chs. 4-5

N.B. Warner and Peattie may both be difficult to get hold of. Gordon and Jacobs should prove easier to locate and may both be purchased at reasonable prices. Although copies of these and other relevant literature will be placed in the library this summer, don't count on having time to read and inwardly digest. Begin getting your thoughts down on paper now.